

---

PRINTED

By His Majesty's Special Command.

---

---

PRINTED

By His Majesty's Special Command.

---

A  
**S E R M O N**  
Preach'd before the  
**K I N G**

*In the Chappel at Whitehall.*

On the Third Sunday in *Lent*,  
Being the 7th day of *M A R C H*, 169<sup>6</sup>.

---

By the Right Reverend Father in God,  
**G I L B E R T** Lord Bishop of **S A R U M**.

---

**L O N D O N:**  
Printed for **Ri. Chiswell**, at the *Rose and Crown* in  
St. Paul's Church-Yard. MDCXCVII.

---



---

---

THE

BISHOP of *SALISBURY*'s

Sermon before the KING, 1 R 9

By His Majesty's Special Commission

The Third Sunday in LENT. 1697.

---

---

---

ARGUMENT TO THE  
**PRINTED**

By His Majesty's Special Command.

---

A

# S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

# K I N G

*In the Chappel at Whitehall.*

On the Third Sunday in *Lent*,  
Being the 7th day of *M A R C H*, 1696.

---

By the Right Reverend Father in God,  
G I L B E R T Lord Bishop of S A R U M.

---

*L O N D O N:*  
Printed for *W<sup>i</sup>. Thiswell*, at the *Rose and Crown* in  
*St. Paul's Church-Yard.* M D C X C VII.

---

---

MONDAY

10:00 AM

Went to the library

Spent time in the library

## S E R M O N

Preach'd before the

# KING

# EPHES. V. VER. 2.

*Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children.*

**T**HERE is nothing more natural, than for every Man to form himself upon some Pattern or other. Few have the strength of Thought, and the correctness of Judgment that is necessary for framing a Scheme to themselves. It is much easier, as well as much surer to work after some Original;

in which we may be better able to find out what may be Corrected or Improved, than to form an entire Design to our selves. This is the simplest and surest way of Instruction. Great attention to observe well, and some reflection to judge aright, will carry us far.

But when we view Patterns given us in History, we are apt to mistrust it, both because we flatter our selves, and so do not believe any thing that is too high above us; and because we see Friendship or Interest dispose men to flatter others, both living and dead, we do not believe the Heroes of former Times had so much Good, and that with so few Mixtures, as their Lives represent them; so that dead Patterns and written Examples move us but feebly. As for those whom we have known, we find after much Practice, such Defects and Abatements in them, as will much sink the high Thoughts that a slighter knowledge of them might at first raise in us. And though Charity is willing to shade them, yet still they are Foils which weaken the Lustre of the Piece. If we follow any too closely, we may insensibly enter into the Imitation of their Weaknesses, as well as of their Virtues; and by too servile a forming our selves according to such Originals, we may run into Singularity and Affectations, which are

are always disagreeable. For some Native or bolder airs, that lookt nobly in the Original, shew but poorly when Copied by a weak and unskilful Hand. After all, since a Copy must needs sink below the force and grace of the Original, for Copy imports weakness ; If we take our Patterns from those who afe too near our own size , they will raise us but very little ; and if we take them too far out of our reach, they will make us despair of rising up to them.

But what mistakes soever we may commit in Copying out men like our selves, we cannot err in endeavouring to become as like God as is possible. The word in my Text rendred *Followers* , is *Imitators* , and is the same word from which the Abusive Ones of *Mimick* and *Mimichry* are drawn. God made man *after his own image*, or to be an image and resemblance <sup>26.</sup> of himself. He had no other Pattern to Copy from, but his own Infinite and Eternal Mind ; he made us from that Pattern, and has obliged us to imitate it. But is there not a boldnes that seems to border on Blasphemy in this, for a Mortal man to pretend to be like God ? It seems too high an aim : A flight above our reach , and beyond our prospect. The very Idea of God carrying Infinite Perfection in it, declares

declares him to be Incomprehensible : Can we then pretend to imitate that which we cannot

<sup>1 Tim. 6.</sup> look at : *No eye hath seen, or can see him* ; and

<sup>18.</sup> though all is light about him, yet it is a *Light to which we cannot approach* ; *for clouds and darkness are round about him*, with relation to us. Yet if this Light is too strong for us to behold,

God has so tempered it, and has brought it so near us by dwelling in Flesh, that while we

<sup>2 Cor. 4.</sup> look at him in that *express image of his person*,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>6.</sup> <sup>2 Cor. 3.</sup> we see in his *face the light of the knowledge of the glory of God* ; and in him with open face, as in a

<sup>18.</sup> *glass*, we behold the *glory of the Lord*. The brightness that would otherwise dazzle, is here so softened, as yet to lose none of its Beauty, or its Glory ; it is both more Instructive, and more agreeable, as well as less vehement and awful.

Upon the whole matter it is certain, that this is the Great and Fundamental Truth of all Religion, That its main Design is to raise and exalt the Nature of man, all that is possible, into a Conformity to the Divine Nature. This is the standing difference between True and False Religion, between Idolatry or Superstition on the one hand, and Pure Religion and Unde-filed on the other. That whatsoever proposes any Forms or Practices, Opinions or Interests

to be espoused , that have no real tendency in them to the reforming or exalting our Natures, but that rest in these , as things in which the Divinity will be pleased , as in such Acts of Homage and Submission that are offered to it with which the Deity is appeased or bribed , so as to dispense with, or forgive greater matters. This is Superstition, and is the practice of those who study to corrupt Religion in its vital and most important parts, and who would bring men into Parties , and under Conceits , of which they may have the conduct, and by which they may manage other Ends that may pass under solemn Names, but are really the effects of Passion and Ambition , and are directed to serve the Interests of Carnal and Designing Men.

On the other hand, The right view of True Religion is , when a Set of such Principles and Practices is set before us, which gives us great and noble thoughts of God, and of another Life ; just and humble ones of our selves, with a tender regard to other men, and a generous contempt of this World , with every thing in it, and even of Life it self : And when this set of Mind breaks out into a course of virtuous and generous Actions ; When we shew that our Religion is the best of all others , because we are made much the bet-

ter by it; and all others feel such an influence in our Religion, and such effects from it, that thereby they are both disposed to enquire after it, and prepared to believe well of it. For the World will always think this to be as true an Argument, as it is a short and an easy one, That that must be the best Religion which makes the best Men. All the Rules, Forms, Practices, and Institutions in Religions, must be such as have a tendency to raise, to feed, and to maintain those great and noble Ideas which True Religion gives. When they are so practised, they contribute towards it, and so become a part of True Religion.

For instance, If one prays only as a custom, in which so much Time must be spent, so many Forms gone through, so many Words repeated, and so many Acts drawn out of the Mind; which being done, if he think his Duty is also done, God is pleased, Scores are cleared, and all is set to rights; here is the superstitious conceit of Prayer. On the other hand, If one considers Prayer as a mean and method to raise within him high thoughts of God, and low ones of himself; a severe sense both of his Sins and Duties; with earnest Addresses made to God, and humble Resolutions formed in himself; and thus uses Prayer as a real mean to humble

humble and to purify himself, to keep him in mind of his Duty, and to direct him by fervent Addresses to obtain Divine Assurances; he feels this is a Practice, the continuance of which makes him really the better; and upon such Performances he sees it is very reasonable for him to believe, that according to the Promises made in the Gospel, of the hearing and granting our Prayers, that God will accept of such Addresses, and will upon them make such returns as our Necessities or Occasions do require. This in general then is certain, That God has not imposed Religion on the World, as it were, to lay a Tax on men, or raise a Tribute from them; he needs nothing from us, as we cannot give him any thing; he has only commanded us to be Religious, because it is the only possible way to exalt our Natures, to compose our Minds, and to govern our Actions. It is that which renders us proper Objects of the Divine Love and Complacence, and puts us in the certain way of attaining the utmost Happiness of which we are capable; which is to see God as he is, and to be made like unto him. Our being made like God here, is the <sup>sure</sup> ~~certaintest~~ Method, as well as the surest Earnest, of our being to enjoy him for ever, in that State of a more and perfect Conformity to him, than we are capable of arriving at here.

What is this, to be like God ! Can a mortal and finite Nature, stretch it self so far beyond its Bounds and Capacities, as to become either Infinite or Eternal ? Can such frail and short-sighted Beings, as we are, become Omnipotent or Omniscient ? No surely : Man is but *Vanity*, and even men of *high degree* are a *lie* ; they are no less a *Vanity* than the rest ; but because they seem to be somewhat , they are a *lie*. The Kings and mighty Potentates of the Earth, after all the swellings of Flattery and Vanity , are, when compared to God, as nothing, or *less than nothing, and vanity* ; a diminution in Speech, that wants not its beauty. Wherein must we then resemble God, or how can we hope to become like unto him ? It must be at a great distance, and with an infinite disproportion, that we can pretend to this Imitation.

God may be considered by us, either in an Intellectual way, as he is a Mind perfect in himself ; or in a Moral way, as he is perfect in his Dealings with all others. In both respects we may be able to find out proper Instances of conforming our selves to him. He is a pure and perfect Spirit, not clogged with Matter, or any union or relation to Matter. We are indeed chained down to a Body and lock'd up in it : We are incumbred with all its pressures, and drawn down

down to an earthliness and lowness, by too great a commerce with sense and sensible Objects. This captivates and depresses us, nor can we quite throw it off, or escape from it, till the Prison can hold us no more, and our Fetters fall off. A disturbed Imagination does now viciate our Thoughts; violent Passions and inflamed Appetites do strangely, by a sort of Magick, transform our Souls: They become heavy and dull, feeble and unactive, and almost as Low and Insensible as Matter it self. Then do we rise up to resemble God in the Intellectual way, when we raise our Minds as much out of our Bodies and above them as we can; when we deny our selves all commerce with those viciating Objects, that corrupt our Minds, and war against our Souls: And when we reduce our selves to short allowances, with relation to those more Innocent amusements and delights; which may be necessary to the support of the Body, and to the keeping it in such tune, as to answer the occasions that our Souls may have with it; or to give our Minds such easy and lively intervals between severer exercises, a continuance in which would quickly wast or overset us, that so we may return to them with greater advantage, and prosecute them with more force. But besides this, a Man who would

would raise his Mind to be the greatest and noblest sort of Being to which it can be exalted, ought to break himself all he can to all eagerness and vehemence, and to a quick pursuit of his Passions or Pleasures. He ought to shake off all those additional fetters which he has added to those under which he is put by the state of Life he is now made subject to. He gives wings to his Soul, who raises it often above Sense and Interest, above the views of Pleasure or Advantage, who directs it to Contemplate and to Meditate; and by such practices is, as it were, making escapes from his Body and Bodily Objects, who grows even ashamed of that necessary commerce which he must hold with this material World, and therefore he not only prepares to leave it, but is daily looking and longing for it. In a word, do not all Men feel that when then they let their Minds go far into Voluptuous, Covetous, or Ill-natur'd designs, their Souls are, as it were, steep'd and soak'd into Matter, they are depressed and debased by it, and made capable of nothing that is high or generous. By a long continuance in these things they lose their relish of better things, as they become incapable of them. Their Minds grow down to Earth, and become little better than what the Libertines allow them to be, mere sluggish and unactive Matter.

Matter. Is not this a Degeneracy and a Degrading of our Natures, and a sinking them deeper and deeper into Matter and Corruption? Whereas those, and those only, feel that they have Souls indeed, who rise to the higher Regions of Thought and Meditation: Who break themselves to Appetite and Passion, to Humour and Interest, and live in Thought and Reflection; who awaken all those noble Seeds that are in their Natures, and Exercise and Improve them, and make themselves to become as much Minds as they can possibly be. The Clog of the Body will be often taking them down, yet they will rise up again, and aspire after as much of Intellectual Light and Life as this state of Matter and Mortality will allow of.

A Second thing in the Intellectual way, in which the considering God as our Pattern will direct us to raise and exalt our selves, is when we consider him as Acting eternally upon a true and full view of all things, and upon the purest and clearest Light, with a perfect and unerring Wisdom. It is true we are not capable of this sort of Perfection. God sees all things past, present, and to come, in one single view. Yet in this we see what is the Perfection of a Rational Nature. It is Thought, Acting with Liberty, and Guided by Knowledge. The bet-

ter we know things, the more we examine their Nature, Causes, and Effects ; the more we examine what is past, and look into what may be before us ; the deeper we go into our selves, to consider our Capacities, and to examine our Defects, the greater views we give our selves of Truth in general, the more we open our Minds to know the Works of God, the Courses of the Heavenly Bodies, the Structures of this Earth, with all the varieties with which it is both Beautified and Enriched ; but above all, the more we consider this strange mixture of Light and Darkness, of Soul and Body which meet in Man, the wonderful Capacities of his Mind, and the amusing Texture of his Body ; and when from all this we accustom our selves to think much of God and his Attributes, when from mere Speculative views we descend to more Practical ones, and view our selves, and compare our Obligations and our Actions, and from a strict review of what we have seen, form a wise prospect of what may be before us ; and above all, when a Man brings those more general Thoughts to an exact knowledg of himself, and a strict rule of Life, then does he become truly Wise, and so grows up to be as sublime, and as exalted a sort of Being , as he can work himself up to.

Then

Then a Man grows up to the height of his Nature, when he is often turning his Thoughts towards some useful Piece of Knowledge or Observation: when he reflects much, and judges slowly, but sedately and truly, and frames his whole Life to a constant Pursuit of that which is the effect of so much Consideration and Care. A Man needs but reflect a very little on what he feels within himself, to be convinced of the truth of all this. The more Ignorant and Implicit, the more Rash and Inconstant, the more Headstrong and Wilful he is, he feels that he is the lamer and imperfecter sort of Creature: He whose Knowledge is only employed in the mean Busines of Life, or in the meaner Arts of Cozenage and Deceit; he who is led or driven blindfold, and who neither knows, nor is concern'd to know how he ought to conduct himself, but leaves himself to Chance or Fate, to sudden Thoughts, or unlook'd-for Accidents, and is not the wiser for what is past, nor the carefuller of what may be before him; this Man, I say, is with all his Shows of Wealth and Greatness, with all his Gilding and Trappings, but a poor, a blind, and a miserable Creature: a Slave to Humour or Interest, to Envy or Ill-nature. But he is of a much Nobler Order, one is almost

most tempted to say, of another sort of Beings, who has opened his Mind, and spread his Faculties wide, to the acquiring of true and useful Knowledge; who employs his Thoughts and Time to the digesting of what he knows, and the rendring it useful to himself and others, and who makes it the study of his whole Life, to reduce those his Theories to Practice, and so lives by Thought and Reflection. Souls so raised, are aspiring to imitate that Original Perfection; they are on a true Scent, and in the right Way; they may perhaps make some wrong Steps, but it is impossible that those who take this Method can miscarry. All must end happily with those who begin so well.

As God is Pure and Perfect in Himself, so he is Holy in all his Ways; and all those who arrive at good degrees of this Intellectual Purity, are at the same time very exactly careful in observing the Moral Order of Things, that Rule of their Actions and Deportment towards others. These are reduced to Two general Heads, of *Truth* and *Goodness*. *Truth* is the Virtue which of all others Nature puts on us with the most forcible Impression. It is indeed no other but the speaking and acting according to the Sense that we have of Things. It is that

that which Nature always suggests; it shoots it self ever first into our Thoughts and Words. It is simple and uniform, ever the same, maintained without Care, and managed without Study. It requires a good degree of study to carry on false and deceitful Designs, with proper Disguises, with that contrivance and presence of Mind, and with that Memory and Attention that are necessary to indirect Practises. Whereas if a Man has but the Virtue and the Courage to be Honest, he goes on with little anxiety, trusting to his Integrity, for that will both support and conduct him. *Truth* is the first and the most indispensable of all the Obligations among Men. It is the Basis of Society, and the Foundation of all the Confidence and Security that can be in the World. Many Nations have differed much in their Notions concerning the other Virtues, but all have agreed, that within Society, at least, *Truth* ought to be maintain'd sacredly; and the more open and free, the more unreserved and hearty this Sincerity is, it tends to establish Nations and Neighbourhoods upon a surer Bottom. It is the same Virtue that makes us true in our Words, just in our Dealings, faithful to our Promises, and exact in our Payments: all arise from the same Root, from an Integrity of

Heart, and a candid Sincerity in all that one professes, says, or does. This is the speaking the Truth as one thinks and intends it, and the maintaining the Truth as it has been spoken or promised. This is the conforming our

<sup>9</sup> Dan. 4.

selves to the Divine Being, who is *true and faithful, keeping his Covenant and Promises* ; who is the

<sup>51</sup> Psal. 6.

*God of Truth*, and who *desires Truth in the inward parts* : Whereas the Men of Falshood and Deceit, who love and tell Lyes, who lie in wait to deceive, who give themselves to Oppression and Extortion, who take Advantages from the simplicity and credulity of other Persons, to impose on them the more dextrously ; and who make *Lies their refuge* and their Strength, and are not wanting to fortifie them with Oaths and Imprecations, that they may vent them with the better Grace, and give them the more Credit ; these are fallen from the Resemblance of the true and righteous God, and are lapsed into the state of the Apostate and fallen Spi-

<sup>8</sup> John 45.

*rit, whose Character is, That he abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him, who when he speaketh a Lye, speaketh of his own* ; that is, his natural Stile and Dialect, for he is a *Lyar, and the Father of it*. Here we must begin our Conformity to God, as to our Morals. It is a vain thing to pretend to make any farther Progress in

in Religion, 'till we have learnt to practise this which is the first Element of Virtue. There is no going further 'till we enter upon the diligent Practice of this: as a careful Master will not carry his Scholars over the first Elements 'till they are once fully the Masters of these. It is the deceiving them to pretend to lead them further, before these are well understood by them; so Truth is of so Indispensable a Nature, both with Relation to Religion and Humane Life, that without it we can neither be Happy nor secure in this Life, nor have any Hope in the next. Since *Liars* are reckoned in almost in every Catalogue, that is given us, of those who are adjudged to endless Miseries.

Next Truth is Goodness and in this we find that Nature has also made very deep Impressions on us: We feel Dispositions to Kindness and Compassion, to Acts of Mercy and Pity, and to Love and Friendship, laid in our Natures. We feel that the more these are shut up, and restrained in us, the febler their Influence and the fainter their Power is, that we are thereby the lower, the meaner, and the deader in every thing that is either Great or Generous: whereas the more we awaken and open these Seeds in us, the greater Compafs they take, and the stronger that they work upon us,

we

we become thereby a nobler Sort of Creatures : We have greater Thoughts, better Deligns, with a more generous Exaltation of Nature and a further enlargment of our Faculties.

Goodnes is not meer Pity ; much les a feeble Disposition to pardon too easily, or to carry Compassion beyond all Rules or Measures : such a Goodnes as this, would too much encourage the wickedest Race of Men, they would presume too much upon it. If Princes were too easie in this way, Society would become an impracticable Thing : The worst Sort of Men would be too bold, if the best were too merciful. The chief Acts of Goodnes are, the endeavouring to make others truly Good. He who feels in himself the Power and Excellence of the Principles of Religion and Virtue, endeavours to spread and communicate these all he can : He is so sensible of his Happiness, in being under their Influence, that he takes all the Methods he can, to infuse the like Sense into all others. Love and Compassion are the Root of this Disposition in him : all the other Offices and Acts of Charity, are Acts only of a Lower Order, though they are all necessary in their Kind : those which tend to make Men truly Good, are of the Nobler Sort. This we find in the Manifestations of the Divine Goodnes.

God

God is perfect in himself, and from that fulness there is a perpetual emanation to all Rational Beings, while they are capable of being made truly Good. In Order to that End even the Pardon of Sin is offered but as an Encouragement to our becoming truly Good: our Faculties are made capable of it: all Knowledge is set before us in Order to that End: and the Blessings of Life are given us like so many Largefes, which make it easie and convenient, to give us the more freedom of Thought, and the better to dispose us to enter upon wise and good Methods. So the whole Design of God in all his Dealings with us, is to make us really Good. Other Things are only collateral, and are directed to this end.

Here then is the true Idea of perfect Goodness; a real Desire and hearty Endeavour to make Men good, by all the Means and Methods that we can think on.

*HAPPY THEY* who have their Power to do much Good; who ought to consider this as the Noblest Character of Divinity, by which they do shine with a Glory that is much Brighter than all the Attire of Majesty. They are born to be publick Blessings to Mankind, not only as they protect and defend them, as they rescue them from Oppression and Tyranny

rany, and as they do Justice and spread their Royal Bounty among their People. This is no small Degree of Honour, but it is not all their Dignity. They can make the World not only the safer and the happier, but the better by their Means. They can set such an Example that will bring many to endeavour to imitate it. What they do is much observed ; they are ever in view, and always narrowly lookt to. Many for Interest, and others for Decency, will follow the Patterns that they set, especially if all is Uniform and of a Piece ; and if they join with it, the Influences of their Favour, and the Force of their Authority, to encourage and promote Virtue and Religion, and to discourage and disgrace Vice and Impiety.

The bare Practice of Virtue, and giving good Examples, is all that the lower sort of Men are capable of doing, in order to the reforming the World. But for those who are fortified with Power and Authority, who have Rewards and Punishments in their Hands, besides that, which in other Persons is of little Force, but has in them a mighty Influence, their good or ill Looks which carry Life, or give Death, or at least a Damp that will put boldest to a stand. For them, I say, to be silent

Ob-

Observers of the Vices of others, is to give them Impunity, if not Protection. When these are of the side of Nature, and give it scope, then they are very successful: little Labour, with bad Examples in those set on high, will soon corrupt a Nation. But when they work against the Current, tho' the Foundation of all that they can hope to effect, must be laid in their own good Example; yet this will work slowly and feebly, if not follow'd with a mighty Influence. Practices that have got possession, when they have Nature on their side, will be stubborn, and are not easily conquered. But Rewards and Encouragements, with some few Severities, when extorted, will turn the Tide at last.

Are not those then born for the Noblest Ends, and exalted to the best Purposes, who live and govern so, that the World grows the better by their means. But as this is the Top of their Honour, and a high one it is indeed, so they must remember that they must give an Account of it to him *by whom Kings reign*. The greater Opportunities and Advantages that are put in their Hands, they have so much the more to answer for, since *to whom much is given, of them much will also be required*.

¶ Pet. 2.9.

Here then is our Pattern, and this is our Lesson; we must be the *followers of God*, and *shew forth the vertues of him who hath called us from darkness to his marvellous light*. But if we think this is too far out of sight, let us view it a little, as it is brought nearer us, and set before us in more sensible Idea's. In the Person of our Blessed Saviour, we see those Characters of the Divinity, in a Light, that is more accommodated to our Faculties. If we view him with relation to the Particulars that have been hitherto insisted on, we find that tho' he was clothed with our Nature, together with all its innocent Infirmities, yet he not only kept at a perfect distance from all the Defilements of Sense, but he despised Wealth and Greatness, Ease and Pleasure, and fled even from the Offers of a Crown: He neglected his Person, and spent many Days in Fasting, and the Nights in Prayer: He lived in Contemplations that were indeed above us, because he saw Truth in a Light superior to our Capacities: He was neither led by Partialities nor Humours, but was ever delighted to do the Will of God in all things. *There was no guile in his mouth:*

¶ Pet. 2.22.

¶ Tim. 6.23.

He would not save his Life by the concealing or disguising of Truth, but freely confessed that upon which his Enemies were resolved to take

912.

it

it away: He was ever open and sincere, tho' he knew that all his Words were wrested to the worst Sense possible. He was ever *doing good*, as his Life was a perfect Pattern of it: His Time was chiefly employed in instructing the Multitudes that gathered about him: he taught them plainly, suitably to their Capacities, with great Tenderness and Patience: only he shewed a just Indignation, which he has thereby recommended to us, against the proud, the bloody, and the hypocritical Corrupters of Religion in his Time: He bore all the Contempt that was put upon him, and all the Injuries that were done him, with silence and patience, and was ever ready not only to forgive them, but to render Good for Evil; while an unaffected Humility, and a decent Modesty run thro' all he either said or did. Thus he lived, and thus he died. He died that he might reconcile us to God; but he lived to set us a Pattern, to shew us what true Religion was, how to be attained, and how practised. This was that which gave the Christian Religion its chief Authority, after the Miracles with which it was at first proved, had ceas'd. The Shining Lives, the Purity, the Sincerity, and the Charity of those who professed it, recommended it so effectually to the World, that even the most malicious

Jul. Ep. 49. licious of all its Enemies, *Julian the Apostle*, in a Letter to one of his Priests, in which he laments the small Progress he was making in restoring Heathenism, and confesses the Disorders that were among them, says, *The Christians*, (whom he in derision calls usually the *Galileans*) *had gained their Credit by their Charity to the Poor, and by the Gravity or Purity of their Lives.* It is true, his Malice made him put in the Word *counterfeit Gravity*, but the virulence of that is very plain. In the same Letter, speaking of relieving the *Poor*, he does it by this Gradation; he reproaches the *Gentiles* with their neglect of them; he says none of the *Jews* did beg; but of the *Christians*, he says they not only take care of their own Poor, but of ours likewise. It was by the force of such Patterns, that the Christian Religion prevail'd so much as it did in the World.

But what made the Stand? what put a Stop to its Progress, and has brought it under so fatal a Re-verse, that now it is losing Ground instead of gaining any? We that are called *Christians*, are chiefly to be blam'd for this: Our bad Practices, and the ill Examples we set the World, have given it deep, and, with relation to us, just Prejudices. It amazes a Man to think, what it can be that should possess the World so much against

a Religion that is so Pure and Holy in all the parts of it, but chiefly in its Precepts, and that particularly tends to make all Mankind both safe and happy. The first and great Reason, is the corruption of Men's Natures; that stands it out in a stiff opposition to that which is so contrary to them, to their Ends, their Interests, their Appetites, and their Passions. This they are willing to fortifie by all the ill-natur'd Observations, whether true or false, that they can make, of those who are of any Form, or bear any Character in this Religion. But suppose all were true that they suggest, and that we were as bad as they wish we were, or study to make us appear to be; we are certainly so much the more to blame, since our Practices will have a more certain Influence than our Discourses; yet whatever we may be, tho' we may have the Defects and Infirmitie's of Humane Nature hanging about us, and returning too often on us, yet *we have this treasure put in earthen vessels.* 2 Cor. 4. 7. How contemptible soever the Pot or *Vessel* may be, that makes not the *Treasure* found in it to be of less Value. It is so temper'd, and was so from the very beginning, that *the excellency of the power may appear to be of God, and not of Man.* Let Men say of us what they please, and let us defend us

us from it the best we can, yet what can the whole Tribe of Libertines say against the Vertues and Rule of Life, that Temper of Mind, and Course of the whole Conversation, that this our Religion prescribes: Let us bear our own Burden, but let no part be cast on that Faith which we believe, and that Doctrine in which we instruct the World: Nor ought Judgments to be made too rashly: for Men may have weak Sides and frail Minutes, and yet upon the whole they may sincery believe, and faithfully follow this *form of Doctrine*, even tho' Humane Nature may be so strong, as to make them give Ground sometimes, and start aside but too often. Yet certainly this is so strong a Prejudice to those who seek for it, and study to fortifie themselves by it, against the Power of Conviction, that it ought to have a great effect on all Persons, in whom, or by reason of whom the Honour of Religion may be concerned; to oblige them to a great attention to themselves, and to a strict watchfulness over all they do; for they are watched and obferved by others, who wait for their halting, and will not fail to improve all the advantages that are given in this manner, with a most industrious spite. But afer all, we cannot pretend to go further than  
*1 Cor. 11. 1. St. Paul did, Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ.*

*Christ.* Then indeed our Words will have the utmost Force, that can be put in Words, when our Lives are of a piece with them: but when it is otherwise, it is the worse for our selves; but our Cause has still the same truth and the same force in it, how ill soever it may be set out, or supported by us. God be thanked for it, we are not so destitute of Patterns, but that some remain; and some we have known, who are now enjoying the Rewards of their Religion and Virtue, who have signally edify'd the World, and whose Name and Fame do still live.

We are to do all this *as dear Children*, under deep Impressions of the Love and Goodness of God: for these are the powerfulest Motives to a generous and lively Obedience. The Glory and Majesty of God strike us, but his Goodness overcomes all those that are capable of a just sense of things; we receive a great deal in common with the rest of Men, or of Christians, and those Blessings are of such a Nature, that if we but let them in upon our Thoughts, in their true value, we will feel a mighty force in them, to determine us to a sincere Obedience. The Blessings that go to all Mankind in common, or at least to a great part of it, will not perhaps make such Impression on some, as those that are more special, or that having more immedi-  
ately

ately and particularly to themselves. In such every Man who examines the whole conduct of Providence towards himself, from his first setting out to the present time, will be able to collect such a train of kind and tender, happy and indulgent Instances of the Goodness of God towards him, preserving him from Evil, rescuing him out of Dangers and Inconveniences, conducting him thro' Difficulties, and following him with many Blessings; that he will soon find Matter enough, if he but believes and observes Providence, to raise within himself a grateful Sense of it, and humble Acknowledgments for it. In this no Man's Life is so barren, but that it will afford him great occasions of Praise and Thanksgiving: for all Men share more or less in the Watchfulness of Providence.

SOME have indeed had a larger measure of it: happy and great Accidents, have as it were by a Combination, led them thro' Difficulties that seem'd insuperable, they have rescu'd them out of Dangers, that have been of so extraordinary a Nature, as if They had been directed on Design, to shew the wonderful Interpositions of Providence, for their Preservation. Friends and Enemies, Seasons and Winds, and Heaven and Earth, have seem'd as it were to conspire to their

their Elevation, and cross Accidents have seem'd to be interspersed thro' their Lives, only to make the unlookt-for happy *Crisis*, come with the greater surprize upon themselves, and upon all others, as if they were the special Favourites of Providence, and markt out to be among the most amazing Instances that can occur in History. If such things have hapned to any, and have set them as much above the rest of Mortals by the Distinctions of Providence, as they are by the Elevation of their Fortunes, then what Returns do they owe to that Goodness and Love that has been so very bountiful to them, in such a copious Distribution of its Favours? What returns of Praise and Gratitude ought they to make? How ought they to distinguish themselves from the rest of Mankind, by their Zeal and Activity, and by their Influence and Authority, to promote the Glory of that God who has laid so much Honour on them, and to employ their thoughts and time chiefly in contriving and executing the best Designs they can think of, or that can be suggested, for the greatest Good of Mankind; which, if they sincerely pursue, this will be, after all, the greatest of all the Blessings of Heaven to them; it will make them Blessings indeed to this World, and advance them to the highest degrees of Happiness in the next.

Here is then the design of Religion, the chief Aim to which all the rest is directed, to raise and perfect our Natures, to make them as great and as pure, as wise and as good as is possible: to raise them above the Depressions of Interest and Sense, above the Intanglements of Appetite and Passion, above little, low, and narrow things, to an enlargement of their Capacities, to an exaltation of their Thoughts and Tempers, and, in a word, to make them become like God, that is, the perfectest kind of Beings possible. Can a greater Thought enter into the Mind of Man, or can he pursue a nobler Design? which carries Greatness and Majesty in very Sound of it. It is plain this must be the greatest Design of Religion: it is the primary End of the Creation, and the chief Business of the whole Christian Religion. Every Man must feel there is somewhat in the bare Proposition of it, that strikes his Faculties, which presently yield to it, and dispose him to close with it.

Oh happy they who do really set about, and do sincerely prosecute it: It shews a nobleness of Mind to be capable of so great a Thought, which could not move an abject Soul. This is none of those vain Speculations that set Men on to a fantastical Pursuit of unattainable things.

The

The Design is solid and practicable, as well as it is generous and great: It does not swell the Mind with Air and Vanity, on the contrary it seasons it with Modesty and Humility. How difficult soever the Performance may be, there are Aids proportioned to the Labours of it; which will both encrease our Force, and render all those Difficulties the more easie to us.

Our sincere Endeavours will be both accepted and assisted; and how small a Progress soever we may make here, how often soever we may be taken down from so high a Flight, and how much soever we may feel our Bodies and our Senses, and the necessary Commerce that we are engaged in with sensible Objects, depress and distract us; yet as there is a secret Pleasure in great Undertakings, even tho' our Success does not answer our Hopes, so we are sure we shall master all at last, and in Conclusion arrive at that State of a more perfect Conformity, whereas our Bodies shall be made like unto the glorified Body of the Son of God, and shall shine as the Sun in the Kingdom of our Father, so in our Minds we shall become like unto God; for we shall see him as he is, and the sight of these infinite Perfections shall transform our Minds, into as near a Resemblance of them, as is possible: and as in this

Life

we shall ever feel a true Joy and real Happiness, following us, in proportion to those Advances we make in our Conformity to God: so when that Conformity shall be carry'd as far as our created and limited Capacities can go, then we shall with it partake of a proportion'd fulness of Joy: as great a fulnes as our Faculties can receive: and we shall be ever with the Lord, in those Pleasures that are for evermore. In this our being now the followers of God will certainly end; we who study to follow him here, shall follow him into those Mansions of Glory, where with Angels and Saints we shall be unspeakably happy to all Eternity.

Thither God of his infinite Mercy lead us thro' all the Changes and Chances of this mortal Life; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Saviour, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory both now and for ever. Amen.

**F** **I** **N**. **I** **S**.

## ERRATA.

Page 12. Line 15. for *amusing* read *amazing*. p. 26. l. 1. for  
in r. our selves. p. 27. l. 1. for *having* r. *relate*.